

## The French Socialist Party: membership between closed and open primaries

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY

#### *Membership between closed and open primaries*

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**ABSTRACT:** For some years now the clamor for democratisation of parties' internal functioning has been spreading across democracies. Among them, France has advanced impressively in the past few years. In 2006, the Socialist Party (PS) launched a closed primary to choose the socialist candidate, Ségolène Royal, for the 2007 presidential election. Approaching the 2012 presidential elections, the leftist coalition (PS and PRG) launched open primary elections to select its chief-executive candidates, with François Hollande finally emerging as a nominee.

In this article, we shall examine how the socialist membership changed during the past three socialist congresses, analysing the outcome of the two above-mentioned primary elections. In particular, we shall observe the Le Mans (2005), Reims (2008) and Toulouse (2012) Congresses, and describe membership, participation, and competitiveness within the PS. The study was based on data collected from an administrative unit, the French *départements*.

**KEYWORDS:** France, membership, party congress, primary election, Socialist Party

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## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1. Internal democratisation of parties, and membership

For over a couple of decades, comparative literature is deluged with input on parties that are affected by powerful internal crisis (Dalton 1984; Webb, Farrell and Holiday 2002). The decay of party organisation (Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2011) has somehow affected the entire membership status. Democratic and Western-style countries are challenged by new kinds of political actors, such as social movements and new forms of web-democracy representing the concerns and interests of ordinary people. As a consequence, researchers have noticed a steady decline in the membership of parties, and a turnout, over the past half a century (Franklin 2004; Franklin, Mackie and Valen 1992).

Despite the flexible dimension of party organisations, *i.e. parties without partisans* (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000), in actual fact parties are still searching for 'partisans' for their organisations (Ion 1997, 2001; Scarrow 1996, 2000; Ware 1996). However, "unlike militants in traditional parties, most new members are mainly guided by opportunistic motivations, for their membership is no longer due to vocation or life choice" (Raniolo 2013): is this an unfaithful and self-interested membership?

Probably modernisation, together with socio-economic changes and higher levels of education, have led the individual to enhanced political autonomy (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984). In this context, according to von Beyme (1996) we are currently witnessing the phenomenon of *omnibus* parties where people enter the 'vehicle' for some time and then leave when they see no other reason to stay, a phenomenon defined by Ion (2012) as "the post-it participation", a brief, temporary and nomadic participation, 'free' from any kind of group membership. The relation between a party and its members becomes as instrumental as the relation between the party and its leaders. The members' main vocation is for their organisation to exist and become successful (Crouch 2003), so that their party will be able to represent certain values and policies. "The question of how and why people should enter an organisation" (Raniolo 2013, 21) is closely related to the issue of collective action, which involves internal participation, recruitment needs, quantity and quality of members and the role of militancy. In other words what Katz and Mair (1994) refer to as the transformation of associations of members from parties on the ground to parties in central/public office. From this perspective, the concept of membership is analysed both 'horizontally', depending on the breadth of the party's membership, which is given by the number of its members, those who are part of it ('being part'); and 'vertically', that is focusing on the members

who take part in the organisation ('taking part'), thus affecting its internal dynamics and decisional processes (depending on the proactivity of their role). In brief, we are to face dynamics of internal differentiation between a merely quantitative view, reflecting the number of members, and a qualitative view evaluating their 'actual role' within the party (Raniolo 2013, 26).

The process of internal democratisation of parties has led to changes in the relations between members and political organisations. In concrete terms, the fact that the power of selection was shifted to the basis of the party has led to an impoverishment of the role of intermediate activists, *i.e.* those figures that can, in some ways, limit the leadership's autonomy process. Power increases at both ends, bottom and leadership, somehow, bypassing intermediate levels. An expansion of the selectorate may be a strategy for the political *élite* to obviate the control of the rank and file of the party (Katz 2001) where, a more 'diluted' membership is endowed with more power than in the past.

In addition, as pointed out by Ion (2012), both collective practices (meetings, rallies, etc.) and individual ones (petitions, protests, etc.) change in terms of implementation. From this perspective, the internal democratization of political parties leads to some reflections on representative democracy, as well as on the end of the political parties monopoly during nominations (Bourdieu 1981; Gaxie 1996). In addition, the transformations highlighted by Manin (1995) towards a "democracy of the public" do not correspond to an actual degeneration of the political system, because a personal trait is in itself already a feature of representative democracy, which lays the foundations of trust (faith), but also of belonging, identity and recognition. All this is part of an electoral system that favors the presence of salient people who are able to gain in leadership despite the loss of ideology (Mény and Surel 2000).

And, more importantly, as concerns the intra-party democratisation, the above-mentioned expansion involves members as individuals rather than the more active militants (Mair 1997)<sup>1</sup>. The reason for this phenomenon is that members who are less involved in the life of the party are more susceptible to factors, such as fame, and they are more incline to support the leadership's directives in order to gain greater visibility (Hazan 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is neither the congress, nor the *élite* or the activists who assume power, but the ordinary members, who are, at the same time, more 'docile' and more incline to support policies, as well as the candidates proposed by the leadership and by the party.

## *1.2. Several “pathologies” of primary elections*

Primary elections are one of the most noticeable reforms adopted by the parties to expand the inclusiveness of their decision-making processes. In a nutshell, a party using primaries accepts that its candidates and/or leaders are chosen by the members (closed primaries) or by all the citizens (open primaries). A party is composed of several related branches and a change from oligarchy to democracy will predictably affect the whole organisation in political recruitment.

However, early literature has treated primaries for the selection of candidates differently (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Ranney, 1981) from those for the selection of leaders (Marsh, 1993; Punnett, 1992). Since then, the literature has developed a classification and measurement of empirical cases through cross-national comparisons (Rahat and Hazan, 2010; Cross and Blais, 2012; Pilet and Cross, 2014).

From this perspective, the primaries for the choice of candidates, for instance, have been adopted by other countries, aside from America.

At present, this extraordinarily successful tool of democracy is also extensively used –in Western Europe – as well as in Northern Europe (Indriðason and Kristinsson 2013), Latin America (Carey and Polga-Hecimovic 2006), Asia (Fell 2013), and Africa (Ichino and Nathan 2013). The increase in the number of case studies has also made the assessment of the political consequences produced by the primaries on the parties, the party systems, and the political systems by large more problematic. In contrast with American studies, primaries are now said to avoid major conflicts within the parties to improve the candidates' image, and their fund-raising capabilities. Thus, primaries have become an asset for electoral success, rather than liability, as it was previously believed.

Currently, in several European countries, both the primaries for the selection of candidates and learders are adopted by the same parties. In fact, in Italy, for example, the Democratic Party chose its leaders in 2007, 2009 and 2013 through a primary contest (References ... ..), while in 2005 and 2012, it selected its candidate for the office of Prime Minister. In France, although the first experiment of primaries dates back to 1995, the Socialist Party experienced the system of (open and closed) primaries for the selection of its last two presidential candidates in 2007 and 2012, and its first secretary in 2008 (Hazan, Rahat forthcoming 2015).

The case of the French Socialist Party is particularly interesting because it simultaneously presents the two types of primaries, for candidates and leaders, and the two modalities, open and closed. In addition, in French literature (Lefebvre 2011) the Socialist

primaries seem to accentuate the sociological and ideological mutation of supporters (Sawicki and Lefebvre 2006).

Somehow, primaries are the institutional response that socialists have made to the renewal of the party, as well as the new electoral anchor. In brief, primaries in France have led Socialists towards a vision of openness which also enhances performance election and the role of President.

Therefore, it is easy to note that primaries are strictly connected to the long presidentialisation of party organization, the structural transformation of internal democracy, and the dependence of leaders from opinion polls. In 2006, the party decision-making system passed from the apparatus party to the militant base, and, in 2011, to sympathizers (Lefebvre 2011). From this perspective, in this article, we propose a study of the changes in the socialist membership in France, analysing the primary impact on party congress. Our general approach is influenced by the consequences of primary elections on membership (Cross and Rahat 2012). For this reason, the relationship between primaries and party membership has to be differently assessed, according to the rules of the game. When parties have recourse to closed primaries, membership tends to increase on the verge of the primaries. Frequently those 'instant' members eventually leave the party, or they remain as passive and low quality participants. This is considered to be a pathology related to the use of the primaries, caused by the struggles to win the nomination. The situation is completely different in the case of open primaries. If the strategies deployed by the politicians to gain the nomination are by and large similar, the interested citizens are not spurred to acquire a party card, as they may vote for their preferred candidate without becoming a party member. Therefore, a growing membership should not be considered as somewhat deceitful, and we expect that the number of partisans eventually will rise after the primaries, as a consequence of an improved party image.

### *1.3. Methodology and design*

The model of *engagement distancié* (Ion 1997) defines a category where the figure of the "distant" militant is based on individual autonomy as legitimized by the contemporary social organization (Lefebvre 2013). The research attempts to answer the following questions: how has the number of members varied over the past years? How has the impact of primaries affected PS congresses and membership in general?

In order to respond to these questions, we have analysed two datasets. The first one regards the yearly variation in the number of PS members between 2004 and 2013. For

each year, we recorded data on the number of members holding a card in December; and, for the years 2005 (Le Mans), 2008 (Reims) and 2012 (Toulouse), the number of members enrolled on the congress dates. The second dataset focuses on the three congresses and makes use of the 95 departments of the Metropolitan France as units of analysis. The latter dataset includes the following variables: the number of entitled members, the number of participants in the congress vote, the number of blank and invalid ballot cards and the distribution of votes among congress motions<sup>2</sup>.

In the first part, the paper deals with the political setting of the PS congresses in question. The second part carries out an empirical analysis of the two datasets, specifically, an analysis of the quantitative variation in the number of card-carrying members and the ratio between 'being part' of and 'taking part' in the congress. Finally, the study focuses on an evaluation of the competitiveness levels of the three congresses.

Our goal is to carry out a comparative analysis of the three congresses, focusing on membership, and taking into consideration the introduction of both open and closed primaries for the selection of a socialist candidate for the presidency.

## 2. The French political context between congresses and primaries

The subject of this study is a comparative analysis of three socialist congresses – Le Mans 2005, Reims 2008 e Toulouse 2012 – taking into consideration the outcome of the primary elections of 2006 and 2011 (Table 1).

**Table 1. The 2005, 2008 and 2012 Socialist Congresses**

	Venue	Date	Primary	Elections	Motions	First Secretary
2005	Le Mans	18-20 November	No	Referendum (29 maggio)	5	François Hollande
2008	Reims	14-16 November	Yes (November 2006)	Presidential (April and May) and legislative elections (June)	6	Martine Aubry
2012	Toulouse	26-28 October	Yes (October 2011)	Presidential (April and May) and legislative elections (June)	5	Harlem Désir

### *Le Mans 18-20 November 2005*

<sup>2</sup> The first dataset was constructed through data reported at the end of each year by Socialist Party, whereas the second one gathered the official documents published by Socialist Party.

Within this general framework, the Congress of 2005 can be considered as a 'control variable' of the other two congresses. In fact, the peculiarity of Le Mans 2005 was the lack of primary elections, which were systematically introduced in 2006, despite an initial, rapid and rather disorganised attempt, in 1995, to resolve an internal dispute between the then secretary Henri Emmanuelli and the more presidential Lionel Jospin. Furthermore, Le Mans 2005 was affected by two critical political events for the French Left. The first one was the Socialist Lionel Jospin's defeat in 2002, that is the inability to access the second round of the presidential elections, due to the advance of the right-wing. The second event was the rejection of the European Constitution of 2005, during which part of the PS had fought for a "YES" in favour of an active role of the left-wing in Europe. The latter event had caused divisions within the PS, thus leading to the need for an 'extraordinary' congress, in order to repair the fracture in the socialist currents and establish a new general party line. The Le Mans Congress witnessed the contraposition of five motions. Motion 1 – *Socialistes, pour réussir à gauche: Volonté-Vérité-Unité* – guided by François Hollande together with the outgoing majority from the Dijon Congress in 2003, formed by major personalities of the party, *i.e.* Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Martine Aubrye Jack Lang, as well as prominent figures such as Bertrand Delanoë, Julien Dray and Jean-Marc Ayrault; Motion 2 – *Rassembler à gauche* – deposited by Laurent Fabius (exiting the former majority), and supported by Alain Vidalies, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marie-Noëlle Lienemann; Motion 3 – *Utopia* – supported by the Utopia group and by Franck Pupunat; Motion 4 – *Pour un socialisme libéral: vérité et action* – deposited by Jean-Marie Bockel, also exiting the former majority, and focusing on a social-liberal line; Motion 5 – *Nouveau Partisocialiste-Pour une Alternative Socialiste* – deposited by Vincent Peillon, Arnaud Montebourg, Benoît Hamon, Michel Vauzelle and Guy Bono, and supported by Henri Emmanuelli, Marc Dolez, Gérard Filoche and Jean-Pierre Masseret.

After the debate on the five motions (9 November) Motion 1, guided by Hollande, clearly won (53.6%), followed by Motion 5 (23.6%) and Motion 2 by Fabius (21.2%). Motions 3 and 4 obtained poor results, respectively 1.2% and 0.7%. After these results, no opponent contrasted outgoing Hollande, who was re-elected as First Secretary with 77% of votes (23 November).

#### *Reims 14-16 November 2008*

As for the other two congresses – Reims 2008 and Toulouse 2012 – timing was very similar. In fact, they were both ordinary congresses, held after the primaries in order to



choose the socialist candidate for the presidentials. Compared to the Congress in 2005, the PS aimed at a higher level of internal democratisation. This process of democratisation was made possible after 2006, when the PS organised a closed presidential primary election reserving the right to vote only to enrolled members (Dolez and Laurent 2007). In that occasion, Ségolène Royal's victory<sup>3</sup> stood among the three new dynamics of the French political panorama: the absence of the socialist First Secretary Hollande's presidential competition; the development of a long election campaign - which was also strongly publicized - for an internal selection cleared from the socialist *élite* microcosm; and the wave of new memberships with a view to the closed primaries, which, for the first time, diluted the strong socialist basis, reaching over 220 thousand members as compared to the 120 thousand of the Le Mans Congress. 'Baptised by the media' as *présidentiables*, Ségolène Royal managed to bypass the party, its apparatus and its 'elephants', attracting the public opinion's attention before she had even been invested by militants. The former minister gathered her strength not only from her accurately tailored image of 'political virginity' and the fact that she kept her distance from the socialist organisation, but mainly from the peculiar features of a party which was strongly affected by the increasing influence of surveys and clearly marked by electionalism. As we have previously mentioned, the number of activists called to designate the candidate had strongly increased a few months before the vote of appointment, as the membership fee had been brought down to twenty euros. This initiative was seen by senior and ideologised militants as a form of political consumerism and a way of 'diluting' the most motivated representatives of the party. People spoke about de-ideologisation and decomposition of trends, which had now become ephemera coalitions aiming at local interests, and less and less capable of structuring internal competition. Elements which were to characterise contemporary politics were emerging, that is the importance of the role of professional politicians, who do not depend on the apparatus, thus leading to the weakening of central authority, the personalistic exploitation of media to build distinct identities, and the generalised professionalisation of the organisation. All these changes were to reinforce personalisation, leaders' individualism and party indiscipline. This tension was followed by the defeat at the presidentials in 2007 against Nicolas Sarkozy, and the idea that once again the PS had paid for its internal fractures and external media influence. The Reims Congress 2008 took place in this

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<sup>3</sup> Ségolène Royal was nominated by a large majority as from the first ballot with 60.6%, against Dominique Strauss-Kahn's 20.8% and Laurent Fabius' 18.6%.

complex political and electoral context<sup>4</sup>. In fact, the dispute among Martine Aubry, BertandeDelanoë and Ségolène Royal, had split the party's former majority. The congress procedure – the members' direct election of the secretary – had also proven to be a novelty in the choice of the First Secretary.

Reims witnessed the contraposition of 6 motions. Motion A – *Clarté, courage, créativité* – presented by BertandeDelanoë and supported by François Hollande, Jean-Marc Ayrault, Lionel Jospin and Harlem Désir; Motion B – *Pôleécologique* – presented by GéraudGuibert and Christophe Caresche; Motion C – *Un monde d'avance. Reconstruirel'espoir à gauche* – deposited by BenoîtHamon and supported by Henri Emmanuelli, Marie-NoëlleLienemann, Gérard Filoche, Pierre Larrouturnou, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Marc Dolez and Jacques Fleury; Motion D – *Changer à gauche pour changer la France* – presented by Martine Aubry and supported by MaryliseLebranchu, Laurent Fabius and Arnaud Montebourg; Motion E – *L'espoir à gauche, fier(e)s d'être socialistes* – deposited by Gérard Collombe supported by Ségolène Royal, Jean-Noël Guérini, FrédéricLéveil-lé, GaëtanGorce and Manuel Valls; Motion F – *Socialistes, Altermondialistes, Écologistes* – by the Utopia group and presented by Franck Pupunat.

The votes of the supporters of the various motions (6 November) gave motion E, guided by Collomb and Royal, an advantage (29.1%), followed by Delanoë's motion A (25.2%), and Aubry's motion D (24.3%). Hamon's motion C was not that behind (18.5%), whereas motions B and F secured respectively 1.6% and 1.2% ranking fifth and sixth. The election of the First Secretary (20 and 21 November) witnessed the heated election race between Royal and Aubry – Hamon had ranked third at the first ballot and had then supported Aubry – which ended after a few days, Aubry defeating his opponent with an advantage of 102 votes.

#### *Toulouse 26-28 October 2012*

The Toulouse Congress differed from the previous congress in two ways. The primaries were no longer closed but open, and, after over thirty years, socialists gained presidency. In fact, after the closed primaries in 2006, and Royal's media success, and after the direct election of the socialist secretary in 2008, the French issue of democratisation was influenced by the contagious effect of other primaries in Europe, such as the Italian case. As a consequence, *intellectuels*, practitioners and political theorists began

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<sup>4</sup> However, the good results the PS obtained during the local and cantonal elections in 2008 are also worth mentioning.

to use the French press to urge the Socialist Party to adopt the Italian primary system. Finally, in 2009, a detailed report titled *Pour des primaires ouvertes et populaires* was brought out by the socialist secretary, Arnaud Montebourg. Approaching the 2012 *présidentielle*, the party officially adopted a primary framework similar to the Italian Democratic party (De Luca 2014). The so-called *primaires citoyennes* held in October 2011 were a coalition open primary organised by the Socialist Party and the Radical Party of the Left employing a two-round electoral system. For prospective voters the requisites to participate were a pre-registration in an electoral list, a contribution of one Euro, and the signature to the charter party values. Six candidates ran in the first round. As no candidate obtained 50% of the votes, the two most voted, Hollande and Aubry, contested the second round, and François Hollande was nominated as presidential candidate, securing 56.6% of the total votes. Successively, Hollande defeated the incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy in the runoff of the presidential election, and after a few weeks the leftist parties secured a large majority in the *Assemblée Nationale* to support the government led by the Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault.

The Toulouse Congress took place just a few months after Hollande's victory in the elections for the presidency of the Republic, and the victory of the PS at the legislative elections.

The new regulations took into consideration the statutory modifications of 2010, that is setting a time limit of six months after the presidentials for the congress to take place, and with an interval of five years between one congress and another, in contrast with the previous three-year interval. Another change was the obligatory bundling of votes in case of motions and elections of the secretary, according to which the first signatories of the two most voted motions automatically stood for the position of First Secretary. The latter was to be elected directly by the party members one week after the motion voting.

Five motions were presented at the Toulouse Congress. Motion 1 – *Mobiliser les Français pour réussir le changement* – presented by Harlem Désir and Guillaume Bachelay, and supported by the incumbent Martine Aubry, the Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, by the government's socialist ministers and by a majority of members of parliament; Motion 2 – *Question de principes* – presented by Juliette Méadel and supported by Gaëtan Gorce; Motion 3 – *Maintenant la gauche* – presented by Emmanuel Maurel and supported by Gérard Filoche, Marie-Noëlle Lienemann, Jérôme Guedj and the movement Utopia; Motion 4 – *Oser. Plus loin. Plus vite* – presented by Stéphane Hessel and supported by Pierre Larroustourou; Motion 5 – *Toulouse, mon congrès* – presented by Constance Blanchard and in line with the policy of opening up to society and sympathizers. Voted by card-carrying members on 11 October, Désir's motion 1 gained

a decisive majority (67.9%) over his rivals. Maurel's motion 3 and Hessel's motion 4 secured, respectively, 13.3% and 11.8%, whereas Méadel's motion 2 and Blanchard's motion 5 secured 5.1% and 1.2%. In keeping with the new regulations, the first signatories of the two most voted motions, Désir and Maurel, could stand for the position of First Secretary. Voted by card-carrying members on 18 October, Harlem Désir was appointed as First Secretary with 72.5% of consensus.

### 3. Empirical findings

#### 3.1. 'Being part': changes in membership

The current Socialist Party, which has its roots in the long history of the *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière* (SFIO), underwent profound sociological, organisational and ideological transformations in 1971 during the Epinay Congress. Since then, the party has become a presidential electoral machine, thus losing its social anchorage, and developing a culture of militancy, which reflected the entity of 'elected' socialist members in local municipalities (Lefbvre 2011).

The average number of members from the 70s onwards has been around 140 thousand actual members, which, in fact, represent the socialist 'municipal armour' (*ibidem*), though, in 2012, at the Toulouse Congress, the PS officially counted 173 thousand card-carrying members (Table 2). Table 2 shows the different peaks of membership recorded by the PS between 2004 and 2013. It is immediately clear that there was an increase in the number of members on the verge of the presidential elections of both 2007 and 2012, when the party was able to maximise its membership. However, the highest peak was reached in the 2006 primaries (+41%) when, as previously mentioned, the cost of subscriptions had noticeably decreased, thus allowing sympathisers to join the party and take part in the closed primaries. It is worth mentioning that, unlike parties of communist matrix, the PS has never been a mass party, but, as from the 70s, its self-renewal focused on the catalysation of associative and union militancy, which was closer to the working class. The revaluation of militancy and the proximity of the emerging feminist, ecologist, and urban causes allowed the PS to widen its influence (Sawicki 1997). Nevertheless, the PS remained firmly anchored to the well-defined socialist groups, *i.e.* teachers who accounted for 18% of membership, while witnessing a decrease in the number of members belonging to the working class. The party was also strongly represented by a militancy of people over-60, accounting for 40% of its

members (D'Argent and Rey 2011). In other words, the PS was becoming an organisation with a socially specific militancy.

**Table 2. Number of members of the SP (2004-2013)**

Year	Congress	First Secretary	No. of members	Variation No.	Var %
2004		-	126150	+6323	+5.3
2005	Le Mans	François Hollande	127374*	+1224	+1.0
2006		-	179651	+52277	+41.0
2007		-	201397	+21746	+12.1
2008	Reims	Martine Aubry	232912*	+31515	+15.6
2009		-	177817	-55095	-23.7
2010		-	145361	-32456	-18.3
2011		-	165153	+19792	+13.6
2012	Toulouse	Harlem Désir	173486*	+8333	+5.0
2013		-	170000**	-3486	-2.0

\*this data refers to the number of members entitled to vote; \*\*The figure refers to Jean-Christophe Cambadélis' statements on 15 April 2014, immediately after he had been elected PS First Secretary by the party's National Council.

Going back to the comparative analysis – *i.e.* the three socialist congresses – data concerning the members highlights some important features. In fact, Table 2 shows how the number of members of the Le Mans Congress (2005) slightly increased as compared to the previous years (+1%). As for Reims (2008), the data regarding associate members, *e.g.* 232 thousand members, was affected by the Royal phenomena, which we already mentioned when focusing on the presidentials of 2007. On the other hand, the Toulouse Congress (2012), recorded over 173 thousand associate members, affected, in turn, by the positive influence of the presidentials and, most of all, the primaries of 2011, which, this time, were open primaries. The Toulouse Congress witnessed a drastic increase in the number of members, going from 145 thousand members in 2010 to a peak of 173 thousand in 2012. This information leads to reflections on the quantitative variable related to membership. First of all, the congress steps seem to have influenced the number of members joining the party. Their motivation probably lied in the opportunity of taking part in a decision process which was subordinate to a membership card. Secondly, membership was more appealing, due to the particular electoral events, such as the presidentials, but also the legislatives, which enhanced the party's visibility and probably improved its public image. And finally, the importance of the phenomena of the primaries represented the main stimulus in terms of increase in membership numbers. Closed primaries with a strong media impact registered more significant increases, as the right to vote is subordinate to one's membership status; whereas open primaries witnessed a slighter, though still relevant, increase, as one's membership status is not related to taking part in the primaries.

### 3.2. 'Taking part': participation and "non-choice"

Data concerning the 'quantity' of card-carrying members, analysed in the previous section, leads to deeper reflections concerning the 'quality' of membership. By analysing the congress dynamics, we may evaluate both participation and 'non-choice'. The former regards the relation between the actual participation in the congress (the voting members) and the total number of entitled members (the card-carrying members). The latter regards the vote of those who 'choose not to choose', *i.e.* the relation between white and invalid votes and the actual number of entitled members (Table 3). The table below highlights some interesting elements. First of all, data on the participation in the congress records high participation rates in 2005 (83.3%), which noticeably decreased in 2008 (56.8%) and 2012 (51.4%). Conversely, the votes of those who 'chose not to choose' seem to have slightly increased from 2005 (0.9%) to 2008 (1.0%), reaching higher proportions in 2012 (3.4%).

As concerns the vote of those who 'choose not to choose', the percentage of blank and invalid votes gradually increased between 2005 and 2008 (+0.1%), reaching 3.4% in 2012. This latter figure highlights deeper awareness of congress vote at Le Mans and, partly, at Reims, becoming more significant at the Toulouse Congress. Generally, the number of blank and invalid votes represents the value of disapproval of the vote, orbiting from a general and physiological pathology of voting to a sort of active abstentionism (Spreafico and La Palombara 1963).

**Table 3. Membership, participation to the congress and "non-choice" in PS congresses**

	No. of card-carrying members	No. of voting members	Participation (%)	White or invalid ballot papers	'non-choice' (%)
Le Mans 2005	124214	103463	83.3	900	0.9
Reims 2008	224810	127623	56.8	1329	1.0
Toulouse 2012	165791	85150	51.4	2884	3.4

Note: the data refer to the Metropolitan France

Source: *Secrétariat national aux fédérations du PS et Office universitaire de Recherche socialiste.*

The comparative analysis highlights further information on the 'qualitative' dimension, which seems to be opposing the 'quantitative' one. The high number of card-carrying members which, as we have seen, is affected by the closeness to the primaries, now leads us to some reflections. The table shows an extremely low ratio, in the congresses of 2008 and 2012, between participation in congresses and the actual number of card-carrying members. In fact, the percentage of congress participants ranged between 51 and 57%, thus underlining the fact that the non-participants, *i.e.* almost half of the members of the PS, did not exercise the right to take part in all the

party's activities, such as the choice of the political line and the nomination of the First Secretary. Thus, primaries attracted new members, stimulating their attention and enthusiasm, but, at the same time, they disengaged the new membership from other functions which were related to the status of card-carrying members. This disengagement was particularly evident in the 2012 post-open primaries congress. Other interesting data emerge from the 2008 congress, where, in absolute value, the PS reached its highest number of congress participants, despite the apparent low percentage of attendance.

These particularities on congress participation show a clear picture of the state of health of the French Socialist Party. In fact, the low ratio between congress participants and the actual number of members points out the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* members. Moreover, primaries increase the disengagement of new members in decision-making phases.

This disengagement increases with open primaries, which externalize the party towards the electorate, indisputably legitimizing a form of softer activism which is detached from party life.

### *3.3. Competitiveness among motions*

The degree of competitiveness is an important feature for a party congress. In fact, the selection of the First Secretary is usually preceded, as in the French case, by the voting of the congress motions, which, on the one side, reflect the party's political line, and, on the other, are useful to weigh internal forces and consolidate the legitimacy of first signatories. These have always been considered, also in the history of the PS, as the most prominent leaders in the party, and the figures representing the various currents. As we have already said, referring to the monumental 2010 reform, first signatories are the official candidates for the First Secretary position.

Competitiveness among motions – and consequently among first signatories – is, therefore, the most important moment of the pre-conference phase, during which members express their political line in the policy document, and they choose the spokesperson who can represent them in the First Secretary position. From this perspective, the number of motions provides information on the entity of the competition, even though it is not an absolute competitiveness indicator. In particular, the number of motions depends on the actual number of candidates standing for the First Secretary position, but there are also some congress documents expressing minority currents and sensitivities. Furthermore, the number of motions does not provide an ef-

fective evaluation of the distribution of consensus. Therefore, in order to attain a clear picture of the competitiveness factor, it is useful to focus on some functional indicators which, simultaneously, quantify the number of motions and the distribution of votes. Table 4 shows the values of five indicators, analysed in their descriptive statistics according to the 95 departments of the Metropolitan France.

The first indicator records the percentage secured by the winning motion (Winner) in each of the three congresses. It is a simple and evident indicator that records the potential of each winning motion compared to the other motions presented. The data in Table 4 show how the Winner indicator has a minimum and a maximum range depending on the department. Competitiveness should decrease when the range between minimum and maximum is lower. The Winning motion has the highest and most uniform percentages in all departments. As far as the congresses are concerned, the 2005 Congress had a range of 73.5%, with an oscillation of the winning motion ranging between 9.0 and 82.5%; the 2008 Congress had a range of 63.8% with an oscillation ranging between 9.2 and 73.0%; and, finally, the 2012 Congress had a range of 45.5% and an oscillation ranging between 38.2 and 83.7%. Data concerning the Winner indicator become more consistent in relation to the second indicator, *i.e.* closeness, measuring the difference between the two most voted motions. In this case, the data in the table have minimal negative values, which indicates that in some departments the Winner recorded lower percentages as compared to the second (or third) most voted motions, *i.e.* the 2005 and 2008 congresses. On the other hand, the 2012 congress recorded only positive values, *i.e.* the winning motion leading the others in all the departments. At the Le Mans Congress, closeness ranged between -68.9 to 69.3%, with a total value of 29.9%; whereas at the Reims Congress, the value ranged between -57.7 and 63.8%, reaching a very low value of 4.4%. The Toulouse Congress, with positive values ranging between 6.1 and 78.7%, reached an extremely high closeness value of 54.2%. From this point of view, closeness is an easily calculable indicator, which, however, fails to take into consideration the role of the third motions. To overcome this problem, we have employed other indexes, which are frequently used in the literature for elections (primaries in particular), including the fragmentation Rae index (1971), reflecting the distribution of votes among all candidates. The Rae index highlights high competitiveness values at the Reims (.746) and Le Mans (.0613) Congresses, and much lower values in Toulouse (.490).

The second index we have taken into account is the Laakso-Taagepera index, commonly known as the 'number of actual candidates' (Laakso e Taagepera 1979). Although it is calculated differently, this index also varies – similarly to the Rae index – according to the number of motions and the distribution of votes. In this case, the lower



limit is equal to 1, while the upper limit is not defined. The data in the table confirm higher competitiveness in the 2008 Congress.

The last index, created by Kenig (2008), is more reliable, suggesting the calculation of the degree of competitiveness by dividing the Laakso-Taagepera index by the number of actual motions. The Kenig index has theoretical values ranging from 0 to 1. While the Le Mans and Reims Congresses recorded, respectively, real values equal to .517 and .657, the Toulouse Congress recorded .392.

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics of competitiveness indicators in PS congresses\***

		Theoretical reference	Value	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	s. d.
Le Mans 2005	Winner (%)	0-100	53.4	73.5	9.0	82.5	51.9	16.550
	Closeness (%)	0-100	29.9	138.2	-68.9	69.3	26.0	26.868
	Rae index	0-1	.613	.451	.300	.751	.555	.087
	Laakso-Taagepera index	1-∞	2.58	5	1.429	4.021	2.33	1
	Kenig index	0-1	.517	.518	.286	.804	.466	.442
								.088
Reims 2008	Winner (%)	0-100	29.1	63.8	9.2	73.0	29.4	13.843
	Closeness (%)	0-100	4.4	121.5	-57.7	63.8	7.8	24.884
	Rae index	0-1	.746	.345	.432	.777	.681	.065
	Laakso-Taagepera index	1-∞	3.94	1	2.715	4.474	3.24	2
	Kenig index	0-1	.657	.452	.293	.746	.540	.551
								.092
Toulouse 2012	Winner (%)	0-100	67.9	45.5	38.2	83.7	65.2	9.690
	Closeness (%)	0-100	54.2	72.6	6.1	78.7	50.3	14.986
	Rae index	0-1	.490	.483	.236	.719	.501	.091
	Laakso-Taagepera index	1-∞	1.96	1	2.252	3.560	2.07	7
	Kenig index	0-1	.392	.450	.262	.712	.415	.414
								.083

\*The Total refers to the entire Metropolitan France.

Note: The data refer to the 95 departments of the Metropolitan France.

Overall, competitiveness reached high values at the Reims Congress where the presence of three strong motions and, most of all, the direct challenge to Royal led to slight differences among motions in terms of competitiveness. The Le Mans Congress also presented high degrees of competitiveness, even though the power relationships among first signatories of motions gradually decreased with the election of the First Secretary. Finally, the lowest competitiveness levels were recorded in Toulouse with the party fully aligning itself with the winning motion, and, most of all, running before the wind, thanks to the success of the presidentials and legislatives.

The analysis of competitiveness highlights some differences between the post-closed primary congress and the post-open primary one. In the former, competitiveness reaches high levels, due to several factors, including the opening of the PS to a series of individuals who were not educated to party discipline. This new wave of members, sponsored by Royal before the primaries, created a strong division between the 'elephants' and the new leaders of the PS, thus shifting the conflict from the primary to the congress. Conversely, in the post-open primary congress, the lowest competitiveness values were recorded. In this case, the victory of the presidential election together with the climate of reconciliation somehow settled the conflict.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The results of our analysis highlight the variations, in the past years, in the number of members of the PS, and, most importantly, their role after the introduction of the primaries.

The PS primaries are part of a wider picture which entrusts internal democratisation with the task of legitimating the leadership, in view of the decline in the parties' popularity. These dynamics pervade both the problem of the departure of the card-carrying member/elector, and the need to develop new strategies to mobilise the public opinion. These changes have turned primary elections into a functional tool in the choice of party candidates and the leader, thus allowing parties to answer the charge of elitism, inadequate responsiveness, and of the functional disgregation of members in favour of a professionalisation of politics chargeable to the State. Primaries, thus, are not only the public reaction to a democratic deficit, but they are also an attempt to recover sympathisers due to the fragility of the system. It is also worth assuming that the more distant parties are from society, *i.e.* 'parties that lean over themselves', the more incline they are to carry out internal reforms which tend to strengthen their members. In particular, parties undergoing an electoral decline, a decline in membership, or the

ones which have lost the elections, or who have legitimization problems, seem to be more interested in democratising candidate selection procedures (Hopkin 2001).

The French case highlighted some peculiarities of the two conferences (2008 e 2012) following the primaries. Firstly, the number of members, *i.e.* 'being part', clearly increased in both post-primary congresses. From this perspective, primaries are a useful tool to attract new members, and they take on great value, especially in the case of closed primaries. Therefore, the French primaries attracted a new class of members to the PS, allowing the party to reach the highest membership figures in the history of the party itself.

Another peculiarity of the French case was congress participation, which somehow represents the ability to 'take part' in the most important steps of the life of the party. The results of this study highlight a low ratio between congress participation and the actual number of card-carrying members. This only goes to prove that socialist primaries disengage new members from taking part in the congress, thus in the decision process of the political line and the choice of the party leader. This disengagement also seems to increase with open primaries.

Lastly, the study highlighted the fact that competitiveness reaches extremely high values in the post-closed primary congress, whereas values remain low in post-open primary congress. This data underlines how competitiveness is strictly interconnected to participation. An open and competitive party leads to enhanced participation, whilst openness lacking internal competitiveness transforms the congress into a mechanism of ratification affecting participation.

In general, the willingness of a party to gain democratisation, inevitably shifts the party axis towards the outer world (Ware 1987). Furthermore, the strategic openness towards a more diversified target, stimulates the leadership towards new forms of representation of themes and programmes (Epstein 1980). Discouraging activism creates horizontality among new and old members, reducing the latter's capacity to influence both the choice of candidates and the congress political line. This leads to important considerations, *e.g.* internal democratisation influences membership, thus representing an accelerator in the transformation of parties (Boix 2007; Katz and Kodolny 1994) as for internal homogeneity and coherence.

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